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General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commi

207th Meeting

Monday, 9 December 1996, 10 a.m.

New York

Chairman: Mr. Garcia . . . . . (Colombia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Opening of the session

The Acting Chairman: I declare open the 1996 organizational session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission.

As in past years, the Commission is convened today for a brief session to deal with organizational matters related to the 1997 substantive session, including the election of a new Bureau for 1997, the appointment of the Chairmen of the subsidiary bodies and the draft provisional agenda for that session.

Adoption of the agenda (A/CN.10/L.39)

The Acting Chairman: If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to adopt the agenda for the current session, as contained in document A/CN.10/L.39.

The agenda was adopted.

Election of the Chairman and other officers

The Acting Chairman: In accordance with the established principle of rotation for the chairmanship of the Commission, the candidacy for the chairmanship for 1997 should come from the Group of Eastern European States. Since no candidate has yet been put forward for any of the offices by the regional groups, this item will be revisited at a later date.

I would therefore urge regional groups to make every effort to expedite the nominations of their candidates for the Chairman, eight Vice-Chairmen and Rapporteur of the Commission for 1997.

Ms. Arce (Mexico) *(interpretation from Spanish):* It is my pleasure to inform the Commission, on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group, that, after consultations among members of our regional Group, it has been decided to put forward the candidacy of the delegations of Cuba and Ecuador for two of the vice-chairmanships for the substantive session of the Disarmament Commission for 1997.

The Acting Chairman: I thank the representative of Mexico for the nomination of Cuba and Ecuador from the Latin American and Caribbean Group for the two vice-chairmanships for that region. I encourage members from other regions to submit their candidates for the six remaining vice-chairmanships and the chairmanship of the Commission as soon as possible.

Review of the draft resolutions adopted by the First Committee at the fifty-first session of the General Assembly

The Acting President: This year the First Committee of the General Assembly adopted draft resolution A/C.1/51/L.5/Rev.1, which contains specific requests and recommendations in connection with the work of the Commission. For the sake of clarity and for the benefit of members of the Commission, I wish to refer to the contents of the draft resolution, which should soon be adopted by the General Assembly.

97-87022 (E)

This record contains the original texts of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

Draft resolution A/C.1/51/L.5/Rev.1, entitled "Report of the Disarmament Commission" and adopted under agenda item 73 (a), contains the following relevant elements:

Operative paragraph 2 commends the Commission for adopting by consensus, at its 1996 substantive session, a set of guidelines for international arms transfers, and operative paragraph 3 endorses those guidelines.

In operative paragraph 4 the Assembly would note with satisfaction the significant progress made in the Commission's discussions on its agenda item regarding the convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

Operative paragraph 9 recommends that, pursuant to the adopted three-item phased approach, the Disarmament Commission, at its 1996 organizational session, adopt the following items for consideration at its 1997 substantive session: (a) the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned; (b) the fourth special session of the General devoted to disarmament; and (c) the new agenda item on conventional weapons, to be decided by the Disarmament Commission at this session.

In operative paragraph 10, the Assembly would request the Disarmament Commission to meet for a period not exceeding four weeks during 1997 and to submit a substantive report to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session.

These are the paragraphs of the draft resolution which have a direct bearing on the work of the Disarmament Commission.

Draft provisional agenda for the 1997 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission

The Acting Chairman: In preparing the draft provisional agenda for the 1997 substantive session, account has been taken of the various proposals contained in draft resolution A/C.1/51/L.5/Rev.1. For members' convenience, the elements of the draft provisional agenda have been included in document A/CN.10/1996/CRP.6, which has been distributed to all members.

As representatives may recall, at its substantive session this year the Disarmament Commission decided to set up an open-ended consultation group on substantive agenda items under the chairmanship of Indonesia. In this regard, I call on the representative of Indonesia to report on the result of consultations.

Mr. Purbo (Indonesia): On behalf of Ambassador Nugroho Wisnumurti, in his capacity as coordinator of the open-ended consultation group of the Disarmament Commission on the question of substantive agenda items for the 1997 United Nations Disarmament Commission session, I wish to report the results of the efforts to include a third item on the agenda of the forthcoming session of the Disarmament Commission.

As all delegations are aware, Mr. Wisnumurti conducted a series of consultations on this question. I am pleased to inform the Commission today that agreement has been reached on the following: "Guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament, with particular emphasis on consolidation of peace in the context of United Nations General Assembly resolution ____".

Again, on behalf of Ambassador Nugroho Wisnumurti, my delegation wishes to thank the Committee for the cooperation shown by all delegations in our efforts to agree on a third item for the next session of the Disarmament Commission.

The Acting Chairman: I should like to take this opportunity, on my own behalf and on behalf of Ambassador Hoffmann, Chairman of the Disarmament Commission, to congratulate Ambassador Wisnumurti of Indonesia, who chaired the open-ended consultation group of this Commission, and who, through sheer determination, achieved consensus agreement on this agenda item.

As a result of consultations among various groups and delegations concerned during the past few months, it is agreed that the provisional agenda for the 1997 substantive session should contain the three following substantive items: first, "The establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned"; secondly, "The fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament"; and thirdly, "Guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament, with particular emphasis on consolidation of peace in the context of United Nations General Assembly resolution ____". The relevant draft resolution is contained in document A/C.1/51/L.38/Rev.1.

At the informal consultations held today, as was reported by the representative of Indonesia, it was agreed that both the words "control" and "limitation" would be included in the title of agenda item 6, and that the

words "in accordance with" would be changed to "in the context of". I would therefore ask delegations to make the necessary changes to that agenda item in the draft provisional agenda contained in document A/CN.10/1996/CRP.6.

Mr. Liebowitz (United States of America): We are generally very pleased with the way things are going and the fact that we have a tentative agreement, especially on the item on conventional arms control. As some representatives may remember, when the draft resolution was adopted in the First Committee on the Disarmament Commission, we made a strong plea that there be a conventional item and that it be agreed to. We are very pleased that that seems to be happening.

I would like, however, to return to the item on nuclear-weapon-free zones. As some representatives may remember, when this item was discussed last year my delegation strongly urged that the title be "Principles and guidelines for nuclear-weapon-free zones". The reason for that was that we feel that the appropriate job for the Disarmament Commission in this area is to consider this in a broad context and not get into questions of specific nuclear-weapon-free zones, which, after all, as the title currently says, are to be decided on by countries in the region. We would therefore ask whether some consideration could be given to that formulation that we proposed some time ago.

The Acting Chairman: The three items that have already been mentioned reflect a formulation that came out as a result of a long period of consultation. With regard to the proposal that the delegate of the United States has just submitted, I wonder if the United States would be able to make an effort to support the formulation that has already been agreed upon in principle. In any case, other delegations may wish to make comments or express their views on this point.

Ms. Arce (Mexico) (*interpretation from Spanish*): As you have just pointed out, Mr. Acting Chairman, the inclusion of the item on nuclear-weapon-free zones is the outcome of a series of consultations in the course of which delegations expressed their various views on the suitability of having such an item on the Disarmament Commission's agenda. As the representative of the United States has pointed out, the principles and guidelines for the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones are also important elements that will have to be given consideration by delegations at our session next year.

However, my delegation considers that to limit the consideration of this item exclusively to questions of principles and guidelines would be to focus only on some aspects of the subject of nuclear-weapon-free zones. As other delegations are well aware, in the Latin American and Caribbean region, next year will mark our thirtieth year of working on this issue. We believe that in 30 years we have garnered much experience on many aspects that are reflected in other regions of the world. We therefore believe that we should retain the wording of this item as it now appears in document A/CN.10/1996/CRP.6. This should not be an obstacle to the discussion of the points mentioned by the representative of the United States in our debate on this item. However, I wish to reiterate that we should preserve what has been agreed on this point.

Mr. Abdel Aziz (Egypt): We have similar views to those just expressed by the representative of Mexico. We think that the formulation that has already been adopted in the recommendation of the First Committee to the General Assembly is the most appropriate one to reflect the status of our work in the Disarmament Commission.

Of course, in our work on this formulation we might be considering the principles and objectives of the establishment of any particular nuclear-weapon-free zone or of nuclear-weapon-free zones in general. My concern with regard to the proposal of the representative of the United States is that it seeks to apply principles and objectives to the two distinct categories of nuclear-weapon-free zones: existing nuclear-weapon-free zones, of which it would not be appropriate to discuss the principles and objectives, and the remaining regions where nuclear-weapon-free zones should be established.

That is why we are very hesitant to accept the proposal to amend the formulation in the draft resolution adopted by the First Committee by adding "principles and objectives". I would urge that we stick to the formulation adopted by the First Committee.

Mr. Chirila (Romania): On the basis of our experience in the Disarmament Commission, we are elaborating principles and guidelines in the Disarmament Commission, hopefully, in a consensual way. In my delegation's opinion, we should not overdramatize the question of formulation, but my understanding is that the Disarmament Commission is asked to elaborate some principles and guidelines. That is the only practical way to conclude the Disarmament Commission's examination of an agenda item.

The understanding of my delegation is more or less, in substance, the same as the position of the United States. I think we are asked to elaborate some general documents and general principles, and not to elaborate a programme for the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones. We are here to elaborate principles and guidelines, and nothing more. I think our future work will demonstrate that only in this way can we contribute to practical approaches in the General Assembly after the examination in principle in the Disarmament Commission.

Even with this formulation, my delegation's understanding is that we are, hopefully, going to elaborate principles and guidelines. Otherwise, we will end up with nothing.

Mr. Liebowitz (United States of America): I have listened with care to what others have said, and I especially want to thank the representative of Romania, who I think repeated more or less what I had said and maybe did so better.

I would be willing, if this is acceptable to everybody and so we could wrap this up, to do something like what seems to have been done to some extent in the item on conventional arms. I would suggest that we accept the current formulation with the words "principles and guidelines for" put at the beginning. I think that would contain what is currently there, would meet my delegation's concerns and would, indeed, reflect what we are in fact going to do, which is to discuss the general concepts behind all this. I think if we could compromise on that, I think that we could then conclude this item and, hopefully, have agreement on all three items, and I think everybody should be satisfied.

The Acting Chairman: If I understand the proposal made by the representative of the United States, it is to insert the words "principles and guidelines for" immediately before the current formulation. So the proposal of the United States is to reformulate the first item as follows:

> "Principles and guidelines for the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned."

Ms. Arce (Mexico)(*interpretation from Spanish*): My delegation has listened very attentively to the suggested wording for this item. I wish to state that, in my delegation's view, the wording of this item was already agreed on; in fact, it was the subject of consideration in the context of the corresponding draft resolution adopted by the First Committee. While it is true that for the establishment of new nuclear-weapon-free zones the objectives to be pursued for that purpose must be taken into consideration, my delegation considers that if we include this new formulation on principles and guidelines, we would in a sense be prejudging the final outcome for the establishment of a given zone. I think that we must be careful in dealing with this item because, as is clearly indicated, the arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned must be taken into consideration.

It may be possible for us to achieve consensus in the Disarmament Commission on the elements to be considered in the establishment of new zones. It is my delegation's view, however, that a general framework on this item would not be desirable, because it is essential in considering the specific features of each region that one define the goals to be pursued in the establishment of new nuclear-weapon-free zones.

Naturally, we fully understand the interest of the United States delegation in emphasizing the treatment of principles and guidelines. But we also consider that it is precisely on the basis of considering the specific features of a given region that we need to maintain the item as it now appears in document A/CN.10/1996/CRP.6.

Mr. Manickam (India): The first item was agreed after long negotiations. Now there has been a request to change it and I do not know exactly what we will decide. But, if there is any change to the first item, I will have to consult my headquarters.

Mr. Abdel Aziz (Egypt): The revised formulation by the United States does not do much to allay our concern about changing the current formulation of the draft resolution. As the representative of India just said, this particular item was subject to prolonged consultations in which everybody had the chance to consult. It was approved before we went to the First Committee voting; it was tentatively approved in a meeting chaired by Ambassador Hoffmann. I do not see any reason for reopening the subject at this stage, unless we would like to have another round of informal consultations — maybe until the beginning of the session.

We think that the current formulation could cover a discussion on the principles, guidelines and objectives of nuclear-weapon-free zones, as well as any specific discussions to which delegations would like to refer. But I am afraid that, if we are going to unravel the package

which we have already spent so much time in putting together, that might also affect our position on other items of the agenda.

So I would urge that we contain our differences on this point of view and try to reach some kind of understanding in order that this discussion on the item will also take into consideration the need to reach some kind of principles and guidelines on this issue.

Mr. Richier (France) (*interpretation from French*): I wish to make just two comments at this point — one on form and one on substance.

Regarding form, it seems to me that we have already agreed on the wording of this item. If we reopen this question, it would create difficulties, as we are now seeing.

I also have a comment on substance, however, that is very much along the lines of what was said by the representative of Romania. I do not see what else we can speak of, if not principles and guidelines, in the Disarmament Commission. We are not going to have an in-depth discussion of a given region or engage in the drafting of a treaty on one particular zone or another, whether it would be desirable to set up a nuclear-weapon-free zone there or not. In any case, all we can discuss in the Disarmament Commission are relatively general matters. I would tend to think that it goes without saying that we will be talking about principles and guidelines.

Mr. Rivero Rosario (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): At the outset, my delegation would like to welcome and thank the Ambassador of Indonesia in his capacity as Coordinator for the consideration of our substantive agenda items. Thanks to his efforts, we have been able to arrive at an agreement to recommend the third agenda item to the organizational session, dealing with guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation, with particular emphasis on consolidation of peace in the context of the General Assembly resolution, the number of which we will know tomorrow, and which now appears in document A/C.1/51/L.38/Rev.1.

My delegation, together with other delegations, has striven to achieve consensus and accepts the current formulation. It is our understanding that, in the discussion on substance, delegations will be free to interpret as they see fit the meaning of conventional arms control or limitation, to which we are specifically referring here.

In that context, and with regard to the proposals for the agenda, my delegation also trusts that the exchanges next year in the Disarmament Commission on the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament will be as useful and successful as my delegation feels they have been in 1996.

My delegation also hopes and expects that the subject of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament will be included on the Disarmament Commission's agenda for 1997, as that will be the second and last opportunity to discuss the issue. We understand that that will be the case and are making our own contribution to the deliberations.

My delegation has no difficulty accepting the first substantive item, except with regard to the comments that have been made here about the drafting of its name. Frankly, my delegation is very concerned about the fact that an informal or gentleman's agreement — or whatever we want to call it — that was arrived at through the express will of all delegations after lengthy consultations should be broken at a later stage. As a general matter, my delegation expresses concern about that.

I cannot believe that we have forgotten that the resolution on the report of the Disarmament Commission that was adopted at the last session contained ellipses under all subheadings in the paragraph relating to the agenda. In the Assembly, we were unable to reach agreement on the items for the First Committee for 1996. From summer 1995, almost to the end of the General Assembly session and the beginning of that of the Commission, intensive consultations were held on the subject of an item on nuclear-weapon-free zones. We should recall that, in the end, unfortunately, agreement was not reached. As a result, there were no agenda items on nuclear matters.

My delegation hopes that today, in the light of the negotiating exercise that took place during the session of the Assembly, in which we arrived at the wording contained in A/CN.10/1995/CRP.6, delegations that have difficulties with this will accept the recommendation on the basis of their previous acceptance and avoid further discussions that could lead us into major difficulties. Otherwise, this year, we might again have no item on nuclear-weapon-free zones — or, indeed, any nuclear items on the agenda.

Mr. Meier-Klodt (Germany): At the outset, I should like to thank you, Sir, on behalf of Ambassador Hoffmann, for chairing this meeting in his absence. He greatly regrets the fact that he is unable to be here. I shall be bold enough

to try to express what he, as Chairman, might have wanted to say.

Speaking nationally, I believe that my delegation does not have a problem in substance with the proposal made by the representative of the United States. However, we have listened carefully to other speakers and, obviously, some do have a problem. My comments will therefore relate to procedure.

Obviously, nothing is agreed until it is agreed. However, we were, for the first time, almost at the stage of agreeing to all of the three substantive items from the "old" year — if I may use that expression. Clearly, as several representatives have recalled, we worked our way cautiously from agreement to agreement. The first item was already based on consensus language from previous meetings. We then adopted this one, with another item in the First Committee; and this morning, with the help of the Ambassador from Indonesia, we have concluded discussions on the third item.

We have achieved a well-balanced package, in which everyone can find something that accords with his priorities. I believe that we would be doing ourselves a favour if we really tried hard to adopt this here and now. I should like to convey to my colleague from the United States the importance of the gentleman's agreement — to use the term used by the representative of Cuba — that, by accepting the wording as it is, it is understood that we can talk about principles and guidelines. That message was conveyed to him by previous speakers. Given the other points that have been made here and the problems that have been pointed out, it should be in all our interests to nail down the good result that we achieved.

The Acting Chairman: I should like to ask the representative of the United States to consider, in an exercise of flexibility, the appeal made by the representative of Germany. Given the understanding that, in any case, what we are working on relates in general to principles and guidelines, we could, without changing the actual formulation, keep this package agreement, which was carefully drafted after several months of work. I appeal to our colleague from the United States to consider the request made by the representative of Germany.

Mr. Liebowitz (United States of America): I appreciate all the comments that have been made and I have listened very carefully. I have not really heard any speaker make any real, substantive arguments with regard to the words "principles and guidelines". Indeed, many speakers said that that is what we would be talking about. Even our Mexican colleague said that, obviously, different regions would have to undertake nuclear-weapon-free zones in their own way. That seems to me to be a principle or, perhaps, a guideline.

I can report this discussion to my authorities and see what they have to say. However, that is as far as I can go. I wonder whether we could turn the argument around and agree to add the words "principles and guidelines", as that does not present difficulties for any delegation. If we accepted that argument we could also have agreement here right now.

Mr. Laptsenak (Belarus) (*interpretation from Russian*): As, for the time being, we are just starting to address this question, I should like to express the position of my country. We share the view of countries that do not believe that it would be a good idea to reopen discussion on wording that has already been agreed to. As the representatives of France, Germany, Mexico, Egypt and others have pointed out, we have spent enough time in the past on achieving this agreed formula. We had a long list of possible variants and held consultations on the matter.

We were all aware of certain difficulties experienced by some delegations in connection with the formula. My delegation also had certain problems with this particular variant. However, we acted in a spirit of consensus and are working to ensure that the results of our present session are positive. This specific agenda is, of course, one of the elements of those results. If we now start to insert additional wording to that already agreed to or elements put forward by individual delegations, we believe that that will, inevitably, lead other delegations to put forward different wording.

We would like to support the Acting Chairman's appeal to the delegation of the United States to recall that there is broad consensus among all delegations on the desirability of including these issues on the agenda of the Disarmament Commission. The United States did not object to this item at the previous stages. Of course, we all appreciate that, in the discussion of this item, if it were worded in the most general way, every delegation would be entitled to earmark those particular aspects which are of particular interest to it.

For that reason, like other delegations, we would appeal to everyone not to reopen the discussion on the wording of the current provisional agenda.

Mr. Chirila (Romania)*(interpretation from French)*: I apologize for speaking again, but I would like to be more precise.

I referred in my first statement to the fact that we should not overdramatize this subject. As our colleague from France quite aptly said, there is a difference here between form and substance. I was speaking essentially along the lines of the consensus when I suggested that the formula now on the agenda was the result of a gentleman's agreement between us and that it could be the rule that we conclude a debate in the Commission with a general document on principles and guidelines.

That said, I think everyone is right here. My delegation has no problem with the agenda in general. I entirely agree that, as the English expression goes, this is a "balanced package". In other words, perhaps, on the basis of the discussion we have had and on the understanding that in any event we will examine the subject in a spirit of consensus, the United States delegation might be encouraged to relay to Washington that the Disarmament Commission will in principle examine the subject in a general manner and in no other way. I support the statements of France, Egypt and Germany that the agenda be balanced and accepted as is. Moreover, there could be a procedural problem: If we try to tamper with the text, we may have to redraft the language adopted by the First Committee.

I, too, recognize the problem but, as far as substance is concerned, I would assure the delegation of the United States that my delegation, at least, understands very well that we are talking about principles and guidelines to be discussed by the Disarmament Commission and recommended to the General Assembly. If we do not come up with principles and guidelines, all our debates of the past three years will have been in vain. That is all I wish to say.

I repeat that we should not overdramatize the matter. In the spirit of consensus that has prevailed thus far, perhaps we can adopt the agenda in its current form.

Mr. Larsen (Norway): I apologize for prolonging the debate but, needless to say, my delegation can easily live with either of the formulations that have been proposed, be it the original or that proposed by the representative of the United States. Frankly, we do not really think this is such a big issue. As many delegations have said, it is up to the various delegations to interpret the content of this agenda item. Whether one wants to talk about guidelines or principles or other aspects of nuclear-weapon-free zones is up to the delegations during the session.

We also would have preferred not to reopen the discussion, but now that the discussion has been reopened, perhaps we can propose a compromise in an attempt to finalize the discussion during this session. We may want to try to see whether it is possible to bring the wording of the first agenda item in line with the wording of the third agenda item. I would propose that we think about a different formulation. Instead of "principles and guidelines on the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones", we can say simply "guidelines on the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones". This would bring the formulations into balance with the third item and may satisfy all delegations.

Mr. Reshetnikov (Russian Federation)*(interpretation from Russian)*: The Russian delegation has no difficulty with the amendments proposed by the representative of the United States. We would like to echo those delegations that have appealed for the text we already agreed upon not to be reopened. Since we are now very close to adopting a balanced agenda, we think it would be wise to avail ourselves of this opportunity.

The Acting Chairman: My first request is to the delegation of the United States. The last intervention of the American delegation was to the effect that it would report back to its authorities and, perhaps, in the light of what has been stated here, that it might finally support the original formulation that was, in principle, agreed upon. I would like, first of all, to check whether that was the thrust of the last intervention by the United States.

Mr. Liebowitz (United States of America): Well, obviously, what I will do is report back the comments made here and see what conclusions Washington wants to draw. I do not want to tell this body what our recommendations will be since we may not have decided, but I will obviously report back all the comments made here and see what Washington wants to do.

The Acting Chairman: My proposal is the following: First of all, in order not to reopen the whole exercise, we would agree in principle on the three items; then allow some time for the United States delegation to consult with its authorities; suspend the meeting after addressing the next item on the agenda; and come back to this issue again on Wednesday morning in a resumed session. If that is agreeable, we can go to the next item of the agenda today: the dates and duration of the 1997 substantive session.

If I hear no objections, we will pursue this course.

Mr. Abdel Aziz (Egypt): I do not wish to make an objection, but to request a clarification. Is the draft resolution which will be adopted by the General Assembly the one we have here?

The Acting Chairman: If we agree in principle, what the draft resolution actually brings is a recommendation to the United Nations Disarmament Commission. I therefore see no difficulty in that regard. I am ready to hear any another comment on that if there is another view.

Mr. Mesdoua (Algeria) (*interpretation from French*): I do not wish to prolong the debate at this point; my delegation had not intended to speak. We had even thought, perhaps mistakenly, that this agenda item was not going to be reopened. Our experience last year should have given us some idea about what is involved in reopening a question that presents problems. The item on the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones was the result of an agreement following intense and difficult consultations involving practically all delegations. It therefore represents a compromise formula.

As for the third item on conventional arms, formulated after intense consultations held as recently as this morning, it was our understanding that it would be based on the gentlemen's agreement acceptable to all delegations.

I am not against the proposal just made by the Acting Chairman. I think we should give sufficient time to the American delegation, which may perhaps come back with some agreement on Wednesday. However, I also believe that after last year's experience, the American delegation could make an effort to help the Disarmament Commission come up with its three agenda items and discuss them normally, in the understanding that the item on the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones could also include the question of principles and guidelines.

Mr. Meier-Klodt (Germany): It is still, as I said earlier, my deep conviction that, as the German saying goes, the sparrow in my hand is better than the dove on the roof. Nevertheless, let me make a procedural suggestion.

Could we not try, since it is really just this one question which we have to deal with, to resume quickly tomorrow morning? In the hope of agreeing then, we might still fit this in to our afternoon session and have a clean text there.

Mr. Liebowitz (United States of America): I do not know if it would be as useful to resume tomorrow. I would like to give Washington some time to consider this question and hopefully have an agreement. Tomorrow morning might be too soon in that, while I can report by telephone, I think they would rather have a report by cable.

I take it that what we are agreeing now is that we will resume again on Wednesday and again discuss whether we can accept these three items.

The Acting Chairman: I think that, for the sake of clarification, it is important to say that the proposal is to keep an agreement in principle until Wednesday and, of course, to give the United States delegation the possibility of coming back to the issue. The idea is not to try to reopen the whole exercise, but just to defer the decision until Wednesday.

Mr. Liebowitz (United States of America): As I said, I will go back and report what has happened at this meeting, but my instructions do not permit me to agree in principle at this time. To have something recorded or to have everybody understand that we have somehow agreed in principle would, I think, be a misunderstanding.

I also noted that my colleague from India, whose delegation, I think, was the one that was really very much insisting on the formula that is in the text now, said that he could consider going back to his capital and asking whether the additional phrase that we suggested could be included. I wonder whether other delegations could do that?

Mr. Rivero Rosario (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Until this meeting began today, my delegation shared with some other delegations a certain satisfaction — which was apparently premature — that we would happily escape from the annual agenda quagmire. Unfortunately, it appears that is not going to be the case. However, ever the optimist, I trust that following the consultations that we have heard are going to take place, we will have an opportunity at some point in the near future to arrive at an agreement on the agenda items.

My delegation has no objection if the consultations take place this afternoon, tomorrow morning, tomorrow night or Wednesday. We are open to any suggestion. Nevertheless, it seems to me that, in terms of procedure, based on the representative of Egypt's statement with regard to the voting tomorrow afternoon, it is clear to my delegation that these are two separate issues.

Draft resolution A/C.1/51/L.5/Rev.1 was adopted in the First Committee with a recommendation that this body is not in a position to change, not even by the veto of one delegation or 10. It is something that has already been adopted in the First Committee. If someone does not like it, he will have no option but to seek a separate vote on that matter tomorrow. However, I think that, since it was adopted without a vote and by consensus, there should be no problem with the present wording of the corresponding paragraph of A/C.1/51/L.5/Rev.1 being adopted tomorrow, unless someone wishes to change it.

In any case, in this connection, this morning we heard a recommendation on the third agenda item, on which there was already agreement. I wonder whether that recommendation might not be placed in paragraph 9 (c) of draft resolution A/C.1/51/L.5/Rev.1, which was left pending. That refers to the plenary and not to the Commission.

I would recall that this matter is pending. I do not know rules of procedure; perhaps it is up to the Chairman of the First Committee or to some delegation to request the Rapporteur to develop paragraph 9 (c) of A/C.1/51/L.5/Rev.1. In this connection, it is clear that is how it came to be approved in the first place. We shall see what happens tomorrow regardless of what happens and what we wish for here.

The Acting Chairman: In practice what we are going to do is to defer the decision to Wednesday. Actually, this does not modify anything with regard to the draft resolution that was adopted by the First Committee, because what we are doing in the draft resolution is making a recommendation pursuant to the adopted three-item phased approach.

It is therefore up to the Disarmament Commission to agree on the items. To my understanding, there are two separate situations there, but let us be optimistic. I think what we will have Wednesday is a final agreement on these three items.

The proposal is to defer the decision until Wednesday morning. If I hear no objection, I will take it that the Commission agrees to this.

It was so decided.

The Acting Chairman: We shall next take up the question of the dates and duration of the 1997 substantive session. As members will recall, the traditional duration of the Disarmament Commission session has been a period of three weeks and one day. In 1995, and again this year, the Commission met for two weeks and one day. In 1997, the Commission will revert to its traditional practice of three weeks and one day.

I would like to suggest to member States, however, that, in view of the situation now, the Commission hold its last plenary on Tuesday, 13 May, instead of Monday, 12 May, in order to allow the Secretariat sufficient time on Monday to prepare the Commission's report in all languages. The 1997 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission would therefore be held from 21 April to 13 May. If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Commission agrees with these dates.

It was so decided.

The Acting Chairman: According to the provisions of the adopted reform programme, all organizational matters should be concluded at the organizational session of the Disarmament Commission. However, in view of several pending issues at this stage, such as that of the members of the Bureau for 1997, the programme of work, the appointment of chairmen of subsidiary bodies and the deferment of the decision on the agenda items, it might be advisable for the Commission to suspend this organizational session until Wednesday morning, to give time for the consultations.

Mr. Laptsenak: (Belarus) (*interpretation from Russian*): I do not wish to delay the work of our meeting, but if I have understood you correctly, Sir, we have completed our consideration of all the items on today's agenda. Since we have other business before us, I would like to ask if I may make a statement under this item.

The Acting Chairman: I think you have the opportunity to do so now.

Mr. Laptsenak: (Belarus) (*interpretation from Russian*): I would like to take this opportunity to inform participants of events that are directly related to one of the items on the agenda of the forthcoming session of the Disarmament Commission.

On 27 November 1996, the last intercontinental ballistic missiles were withdrawn from the territory of Belarus. In this way, my country has fulfilled the commitments under START I and its Lisbon Protocol before the deadline. This event eloquently demonstrates the stable progress of my country towards achieving non-nuclearity, a priority goal of our foreign policy.

With the withdrawal of the last missile from Belarus, the whole expanse of Central East Europe has become a de facto nuclear-weapon-free zone. We hope that this will create favourable conditions for declaring the area a *de jure* non-nuclear zone and allow the Disarmament Commission in 1997 to consider constructively the questions on next year's agenda.

I would also like to inform members that, in connection with this event to which I have referred, the President of the Republic of Belarus, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, sent a personal letter to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, which will be distributed as an official document of the General Assembly.

I would also like to express the hope that this event and my statement will facilitate the work of those delegations experiencing problems formulating the agenda for the 1997 Disarmament Commission session.

The Acting Chairman: If I hear no objection, I shall take it that it is the wish of the Disarmament Commission to suspend the organizational session at this stage and to resume it next Wednesday at 10 a.m.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.